



*Mayor visits
sorting office
1950s*

200.84

Cambridge POST Chronicle

This will form part of *A Cambridge Chronicle*

c.27.7: Post Offices, letter deliveries; see separate section on Telephones

Robert Knights memories of a mail coach driver before WWI between West Wrating and Cambridge
72 01 14a

1885

Petty Cury post office built [1.22]

1885

Protest over use of University stamps [1.16]

1900

1905 10 28

Morning letters are being delivered much earlier than formerly. The gradual growth of Cambridge suburbs had lengthened the postman's walks until it was almost impossible to get out the deliveries in the time prescribed. Now the number uniformed letter carriers has been increased from 98 to 110 with more men on each of the seven daily delivery rounds. The number of collections has also increased with six tricycle carriers appointed. 05 10 28b [1.26]

1907 02 23

Until recently a letter box was situated at the top of Abbey Road within a yard of a fire alarm. Both were painted red. Now its removal has led to curious incidents, to say nothing of vigorous language on those who have weathered the storms by night to utilise the post, only to find it removed. One young woman was seen minutely examining the alarm, saying she'd "never seed a letter box without a hole before". When it was explained she expressed language which approximated to that of Billingsgate. 07 02 23a

1907 05 06

Post office thefts – 07 05 06aa & b

1907 09 10

Post Office telegraph messenger boys are subject to a short drill every morning; they learn discipline, obedience and punctuality and can become members of the Albert Institute with its facilities for further education and sport. They must leave the job when aged 16 and have previously become postmen. But now half the vacancies have to be reserved for ex-servicemen and the Cambridge Postmaster has a list of boys ready for jobs in the outside world. 07 09 10

1910

1913

Charles Henry Kirkup awarded Georgian Imperial Service Medal for 37 years' service, first time it awarded in Cambridge [2.6]

1913 06 06

Death Henry Hitzman, sub-postmaster, Trinity Street 13 06 06 p7 CIP

1915 12 22

Female postmen start duties – photos (including march past poster 'Grand Varieties') – 15 12 22b Ch

1916 04 19

The Postmaster-General has decided that, except in the largest towns, the number of deliveries of letters per day is to be restricted to two. We are informed by Mr. A. Bell, the Cambridge Postmaster, that this would take effect in Cambridge as from Monday, May 1, when the number of deliveries will be reduced from three, as at present to two 16 04 19 CIPof

1917 03 07

The Mail Cart - On Wednesday evening last the mail cart, which has been running for about 20 years between Cambridge and Willingham, via Milton, Landbeach, Cottenham and Hampton, could be seen making its last journey. Arrangements have now been made for the Cottenham and Rampton mail in future to come from Cambridge to Oakington station by train. Mr. Albert Young, of Rampton, has been appointed to fetch the mail from Oakington in the morning and to carry it to Oakington in the evening. Owing to these alterations, the Cottenham letters will be delivered an hour later than usual. The mail in the evening will go out at 8.45 instead of 8 o'clock, necessitating the posting of letters an hour and a quarter earlier than usual. The mid-day delivery will remain as before. There will in future be no delivery or dispatch on Sundays. 17 03 07 CIPof

1920

1920 09 15

Post Office war memorial, details – Ch 20 09 15c, d

1925 03 28

The stamp machine attached to the door of the General Post Office in Cambridge is such a boon that I hesitate to complain. But on no fewer than five occasions I have found the penny slot fail to act correctly. On the first occasion the machine delivered me two penny stamps for one copper. I was wondering what to do when another purchaser came along and slipped a penny in the slot without result, so I handed one over. The next time I received no stamp for my penny, and wiped that off as a loss. On the third occasion I got two stamps for the price of one, so cried "quits". For those who like a little speculation these stamp machines are ideal 25 03 28

1929 06 09

Cambridge Post office talk – CDN 19.6.1929

1930

1932 09

Work starts on new post office, St Andrew's Street [1.21]

1932 12 16

The Post Office says every effort will be made to deliver by Christmas day all parcels, packets and newspapers for distant places posted not later than the 22nd December and all letters and cards posted by 23rd December. The latest time of posting for letters and cards for local delivery and in towns within 30 miles radius will be 6pm on Christmas Eve. There will be one delivery of letters and parcels on Christmas Day. 32 12 16c

1933 08 11

A travelling posting-box has been started by the Post Office on the Eastern Counties' service which leaves Cottenham at 8.15pm. The letterbox is painted Post Office red and will be fixed on the front of the bus, giving a later posting time than is now the case. It will operate from Monday to Saturday and letters will be delivered in practically any part of England by the first post in the morning. 33 08 11

1933 10 02

Sir – needing a stamp for a letter I hied down to the G.P.O. feeling certain its automatic machines would duly deliver the goods. The nimble penny did function, but the halfpenny, though absorbed into the digestive machinery of the apparatus, obdurately refused to pass out the little bit of green paper. Obviously a serious crime as that of obtaining halfpennies under such circumstances was a matter for our every ready Borough Police. An officer detailed to investigate proceeded to test my story twice, with the result that the Revenue was again the richer, and he, alas, the poorer by the sum of one penny. 33 10 02

1934 05 29

The new Cambridge Post Office in St Andrew's Street was needed to meet ever-growing demand. People knew they could obtain wireless licences, motor licences and gun licences but not that they could get marriage licences as well. There was criticism that the stamps remained the same but it was not policy to make money out of philatelists by creating unnecessary issues and would mean altering stamp machines. Now deliveries would improve and the 26,000 letters a week delivered by second post will in future secure first post delivery. 34 05 29 & 30 [1.3]

1935 09 10

The new Post Office sorting department at Petersfield has a vast and spacious garage complete with repair and painting shops for the upkeep of a fleet of vans. Altogether 50 vehicles are sent out and should anything go wrong a staff of mechanics can tackle the job at once. Even painting and complete overhauling is done. The various sections in the sorting department now have plenty of room with the latest equipment including two electrical stamping machines which deal with the letters at an incredible speed. 35 09 10a

1936 02 08

Cambridge Post Office placed new pens on their counters for a six-month trial. But at the end of a month they had all disappeared. A special locking device held the stainless steel nibs in position, but this did not deter the members of the public who took a fancy to them, as both pen and holder were taken away! Many inquiries have been made with regard to the type of nib used and where they could be purchased (possibly following unsuccessful attempts to abstract them from the pen holders). Now a special red pen holder bearing the letters 'G.P.O.' is being issued for use at public counters of head post offices. But these are not intended for the purposes of ornamenting writing desks in houses and business offices. 36 02 08b & c

1940

1947 12 13

First stamp-label issuing machine installed at Cambridge Post Office – 47 12 13

1950

1954 07 15

The Post Office is to experiment with pedestrian-controlled electric trucks for its parcel delivery service to determine whether they can be operated economically in areas where traffic conditions make the use of motor vans rather difficult. The trucks have a normal speed of 3½ mph on the level. Cambridge is one of the first provincial towns to have them.

1960s The Cambridgeshire Collection has detailed newspaper cuttings files from this date

1960 05 27

At Cambridge about 250 postmen are employed for sorting and delivery work. They arrive at 5am, sort their walks until seven and then leave for the first delivery which has to be completed by 9.30. After breakfast they sort again until 11 when they start the second delivery. This finishes two hours later, leaving the postman the rest of the day free. When letters are posted to overseas destinations with insufficient stamps the Post Office makes up the correct amount, then notifies the sender requesting him to return stamps to cover the cost. This service is greatly appreciated and few fail to comply. 60 05 27

1960 11 18

The postman in his navy-blue uniform riding his red-painted bicycle carrying a bag containing a variety of messages, happy and sad, is a permanent fixture of everyday life. Doug Carter is responsible for the city centre round. The first despatch takes him from 6.45 to 9.15, when he returns to the Sorting Office for breakfast. He then sorts for the second round which has to be completed before 1pm. People confide in him, they make a friend of him and in spite of appalling weather conditions and the irksome irregular hours, he feels he is providing a useful service. 60 11 18b

1962 11 28

Demolition of PO sorting depot, Mill Road [2.9, 3.2]

1962 01 08

To have Emergency Postal Centre set up by Peoples League for Defence of Freedom [3.1]

1962 06 30

Cambridge's last surviving Victorian post-box outside King's College main gates is to disappear for a month while workmen redo the surface of the college forecourt. It will be replaced in a slightly different position and the lamps will also move back a bit. At the moment the workmen are preparing to re-lay flagstones and cobbles, which are badly worn. The side walls are also to be moved back about four feet on each side. 62 06 30

1963 07 05

The G.P.O.'s experiment to improve the parcel post service started with five new lorries operating from the parcels centre in Rosemary Lane. The present system is slow and costly. The new method will operate partly by rail and partly by road with parcels moved in bulk consignment. They hope it will reduce costs, speed the service and improve reliability. 63 07 05

1964 02 04

The biggest pillar box in England, in Sidney Street, may be moved to relieve traffic congestion – 64 02 04

1964 06 27

A giant post box has been moved from its position in Sidney Street to a spot a few yards away. It has been there for 30 years. The box is one of the largest in the provinces 64 06 27

1964 06 30

Sidney Street post box originally erected as only air mail box in Cambridge, 2 slots one marked 'Colonial Airmail', 'Other Countries' & painted dark blue [3.3]

1965

Mill Rd sorting office opens [3.4]

1966 07 15

Old Post Office, Petty Cury, Ministry of Pensions manned by a single clerk in room that precious housed counter activities; small corner occupied by National Savings Movement. Wide corridors lead to Overseas Students Club used by 10-12 students. Petty Cury shops well-maintained but accommodation above ground floor level has been condemned for years. Must all be demolished – letter – 66 07 15

1966 08 23

Fitzroy Street sub-post office moved to Co-op in Burleigh Street, petition in protest – 66 08 23a

1968 10

Two-tier post introduced, 4d & 5d [3.5]

1968 10 21

Postal codes start October [3.6]

1970

1971 01 27

Donald Hofford offers emergency postal service during 7 week strike 71 01 27, 27a, 71 01 30

1971 03 06

Regent Street post office modernised 71 03 06a

1971 09 14

Arbury Estate gets new post office, Cameron Road – 71 09 14

1971 10 10

First automatic mail sorting machines delivered to Post Office in Mill Road – 71 10 10

1972 05

Mechanised sorting introduced May [3.10]

1972 10 31

Twenty-five thousand second class letters are being deliberately held up every night at the Post office's mechanised sorting centre in Mill Road, Cambridge. The letters are sorted into bundles by the 2pm to 10pm shift ready for loading on to trains from Cambridge. But they do not leave the centre until the next morning after the rest of the second class post has been sorted. Assistant Post-master for Cambridge, Mr Reginald Starkey said "It is a second class standard of service. They have paid only 2½ pence". Ironically it is only the second class post which goes through the £500,000 worth of equipment installed at the Mill Road office five months ago. 72 10 31

1980

1981 05 14

Cambridge's unique 100-year-old spiky pillar box has been moved from the corner of Newmarket Road and Cheddar's Lane after local firms protested that its seven-inch aperture was too small for modern-day packages. It was built about 1880 and does not have the royal cipher or the words 'Post Office' on it. But nobody knows why it has spikes on the top. Some say it was to stop people climbing over the gas works wall, others that it was to frighten away a troublesome swan that used to perch on the top or provide an uncomfortable landing for a hapless German parachutist. 81 05 14a

1983 06 09

No-one is likely to support a local post office out of charity. Business has been falling off in recent years, not helped by Government encouragement to pay many social security benefits monthly instead of weekly and to pay direct into a bank account. Some sub-postmasters have given up because their income has dropped by £1,000 a year but so far somebody else has been persuaded to take on the business. Now a 'rationalisation' programme is being carried out. First to be hit is the King Street post office which is likely to close, just as the street has a new lease of life with new shops and flats 83 06 09 p11

1983 07 13

Hundreds of Cambridge residents have lost their long battle to save the sub-post office in King Street from closure. Despite massive protests the Head Postmaster has decided it must shut when the owners retire. Now the council may consider buying the building in the hope they can keep it open. Mr & Mrs Mansfield have given a first class personal service for 30 years which would be difficult to match even if the post office were to remain. 83 07 13 p7

1983 08 20

Dozens of Cambridge residents gathered outside King Street Post Office to protest against its closure. It was the last day of business for the owners, Tom and Ivy Mansfield who are retiring after 30 happy years. The decision to close was taken despite vigorous opposition from the city council. "They haven't given a thought to the inconvenience it will cause people", say protestors, but the Head Postmaster says there are too many post offices in Cambridge. 83 08 20 p3 pic31768399

1983 08 22

King Street post office closes after 85 years [3.11-12]

1984 09 12

Campaigners have lost their battle to save two Cambridge post offices in Arbury Road and Gywidr Street. They will close within a few months, but the threatened Richmond Road sub post office will remain open in view of the weight of public opinion. Coun Andrew Duff, one of the Liberal members fighting to keep the Richmond Road office going says he is delighted at the change of heart 84 09 12 [3.13]

1986 06 19

New mechanised letter sorting office Clifton Road agreed [3.14]

1987 05 14

The last post has sounded for the most painted pillar box in Cambridge. Post office chiefs have removed the box from Trinity Lane, angry at the psychedelic treatment a phantom artist has been giving it with increasing frequency. Last month the prank painter left it in pink, white and maroon stripes. Some yellow ducks followed soon after. Markham Towler, a member of the Letterbox Study Group, says the pillar box was of a rare type and was one of the city's oldest, being installed before 1887. 87 05 14

1988 06 17

New PO sorting office to cope growing mail business, sort all outgoing mail, growing at 12% CEN 17.6.88

1988 06 23

The very latest, sophisticated machinery is being installed in the Post Office's new sorting office in Clifton Road. Mill Road became a Mechanised Letter Office in 1972 but its technology is now in need of replacement. Conditions for the 650 staff are cramped and noisy. Now high-speed sorting machines will hold 16,000 items an hour and Mill Road will be refurbished to act as delivery centre for mail coming into Cambridge. 88 06 23a

1989 03 11

Post Office to open mechanised letter office, Clifton Road housed there since 1988 cCEN 11.3.89

1989 03 25

The new £5.5 million mechanised letter office in Clifton Road was built to cope with the area's rapidly increasing volumes of mail. Letters are handled by some of the latest sorting technology including machines which operate at a rate of 25,000 an hour and has scope for expansion so it can continue to grow with the city. It was formally opened by TV personality Anne Gregg, presenter of "Holiday '89". Later she waved off a special train to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the travelling post office. 89 03 15